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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [EDU](#) [PINR](#) [SOCI](#) [XL](#) [XK](#) [JM](#)
SUBJECT: JAMAICA: OPPOSITION JAMAICAN LABOUR PARTY STAGES
ANNUAL CONFERENCE PROCLAIMING "MISSION ACCOMPLISHED"

REF: A. A. KINGSTON 1903
[B. B. KINGSTON 2020](#)
[C. C. KINGSTON 2021](#)

Classified By: Charge d'Affairs James T Heg for Reason 1.5
(b) and (d)

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) With music blaring and clouds of ganga floating in the air, the Jamaican Labour Party (JLP) staged its 63rd Annual Conference November 18-19 at the National Arena in Kingston. Local media estimated the crowd of green-clad supporters in the "tens of thousands," with the vast majority watching the event on big screen TVs set-up outside the National Arena. Kingston Mayor and JLP member Desmond McKenzie opened the conference by reminding attendees that, one year ago, the JLP had promised to build the party in order to win the next election. McKenzie loudly declared "mission accomplished" to the screams of JLP supporters. With the JLP statistically tied with the ruling People's National Party (PNP), the momentum for victory appears to be squarely in the JLP camp. One observer, who also had attended the PNP Annual Conference (ref A), noted that the JLP event had many, many more attendees. The election may very well hinge on which party can get more supporters to the polls. If the dueling PNP and JLP conferences are any indication, the JLP may emerge victorious.

Jesus Christ, Superstar

[1](#)2. (U) The Annual Conference was staged in the fashion of a rock concert with JLP head Bruce Golding the main act. JLP Members of Parliament (MPs) and other JLP dignitaries sat on a large dais and repeatedly stood to dance to the innumerable Jamaican popular songs (and one oddly placed Kenny Rogers tune) and to whip the crowd into a frenzy. Multiple racks of speakers and a high tech light show completed the visual effect.

[1](#)3. (U) The JLP repeatedly utilized religious imagery that compared Golding to Jesus Christ and the JLP to Moses with promises to "deliver" Jamaicans from the PNP when they triumphantly return to Jamaica House after 17 years "in the wilderness." Interestingly, the highlight of the event was not Golding's speech, but his son Stephen's. The JLP has been reshaping and softening Golding's image into that of committed family man (which has also allowed the JLP to place a high emphasis on "family values" for the upcoming election). When Golding entered the Arena, he did so with his wife, son, and daughter. Son Stephen introduced his

father by discussing the PNP's attack on the senior Golding's attempt to soften his image and the PNP's assertion that the family has not been involved in the senior Golding's campaign. Using the story of Jesus in the temple, Stephen asked the PNP "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I would be in my father's house? That I would be in my father's business?" He finished by stating as Jesus is the son of God, "I am Stephen, son of Bruce." The JLP supporters in attendance began screaming and clapping and did not quit for over five minutes.

The Message: Jamaica Deserves Better

14. (U) Speakers continually pointed out what has failed in Jamaica over the last 17 years. In particular, the JLP emphasized education and government reforms as well as a promise to reduce both crime and corruption. Citing the drop-out rate, the poor quality of education, and the links between education, poverty, and crime, JLP speakers outlined a six-point policy for education reform that included:

- Make education from early childhood to the secondary level tuition free.
- Increase significantly the funding to early childhood education.
- Get more churches and other social and civic organizations to invest in education
- Build more schools and improve the infrastructure of existing ones.
- Transform the Ministry of Education into more of a policy-based ministry thereby providing more money for education.
- Establish a National Education Trust funded primarily from the private sector.

Guest speaker Wilfred Emmanuel Jones (the "Black Farmer" who is running in UK for a seat in parliament on the Tory ticket), noted the power of education to lift people and nations out of poverty. He spoke of his own childhood as a young migrant from Jamaica in the UK and his rise as an entrepreneurial success story. Along with education, Jones pointed out the need for government to "get out of the way" of business.

15. (C) Golding, in addition to emphasizing the need for education reform, concentrated the majority of his remarks on reforming the Westminster system of government. This included limiting the Prime Minister to no more than two terms in office, strengthening the opposition party (no matter which party it is) to avoid a "dictatorship" by the majority, fixed election dates, separation of powers, an independent central bank, an independent body to investigate allegations of police brutalities, and a strengthening of the justice system, among others. Golding also emphasized the need to introduce harsh penalties for corruption in the public sector. Interestingly, Oliva "Babsy" Grange, a prominent and popular JLP MP, was not on the dais and did not address the crowd. She has been publicly linked to gangs and corruption, and brags about "growing" a don (raising a man who became a crime boss - "Bunman" - who was killed in early 2006 in a shootout).

Comment:

16. (C) Despite the enthusiasm generated at the JLP conference, there is as yet no election date to work towards. Several attendees told poloff that they would not be surprised if the election is set for before Christmas. (If so, the election would probably need to be called this week. We do not have other information suggesting that such a decision by the government is imminent). Noting that the PNP continues to sag in the polls, a later date (May or June) will only give the JLP more time to hone their message and continue their grassroots campaigning. In the event of a May

or June election, one observer noted that the JLP would have to do something "very stupid" or the PNP something "very smart" in order for the PNP to retain power. In addition, while blaming the PNP for meteoric rise in the crime - particularly murder - rate since taking power, the JLP does not appear to have any concrete plan for reducing it. The same can be said for corruption. Both the PNP and the JLP continue to openly associate with known gang members. Likewise, attacking corruption, while vital if the Jamaican state is to be reformed and modernized, will be difficult for the JLP as it has been for the PNP. In a sense, corruption is what makes the political system move in Jamaica. The Trafigura scandal (refs B and C) has resulted in only one resignation. The money paid to the PNP (as either a bribe, a gift, or a business payment - depending on the source) has yet to be returned and there appear to be no further ramifications.

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